DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 397 686 FL 024 013

AUTHOR Barnes, Douglas; And Others
TITLE Language in the Classroom. Occasional Papers Number 2.
INSTITUTION Applied Linguistics Association of Australia.
REPORT NO ISBN-0-95967-69-3-7
PUB DATE 78
NOTE 41p.
AVAILABLE FROM Applied Linguistics Association of Australia, Centre for Language Learning and Teaching, University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, Queensland, 4350, Australia.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Collected Works - General (020) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Classroom Communication; Classroom Research; Cognitive Development; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; *Language Usage; Learning Strategies; *Nonstandard Dialects; *Research Methodology; *Student Attitudes; Surveys; *Teacher Attitudes; Teaching Styles; Writing Instruction; Writing Skills

ABSTRACT

Three chapters discuss language usage in the classroom: "Language in the Classroom" (Jack Thomson); "Directions for Research into Classroom Communication" (Douglas Barnes); and "Teachers' Attitudes to Usage" (Ken Watson). The first article discusses how students view their classroom, with actual examples from a newspaper survey. Various teaching styles are discussed, and samples are given from a class writing project in which the teacher served as the examining audience. The second article offers alternatives, based on actual experience, for conducting research on classroom communication and learning, specifically related to the learner's access to knowledge and writing assignments. Teachers are advised not to draw the writing boundary so tight that students cannot express their personal cognitive and affective growth. The third article presents results from a teacher survey concerning teacher attitudes on language usage. A 25-item survey was given to 66 teachers from 8 New South Wales, Australia high schools; 12 English teachers also completed the survey. Findings suggest that, in contrast to the English teachers, most teachers attempt to eradicate nonstandard dialect usage in the classroom. It is recommended that children should be allowed to use nonstandard speech forms, at least in informal speech situations; teachers should offer more linguistic options rather than stifle already existing ones. (Contains 11 references.) (NAV)

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LANGUAGE IN THE CLASSROOM

DOUGLAS BARNES
JACK THOMSON
KEN WATSON

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Occasional Papers Number 2

Applied Linguistics Association of Australia

Language in the Classroom

Douglas Barnes
Jack Thomson
Ken Watson

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1978

Language in the
Classroom

ISBN 0-95967-69-3-7

Editor of Publications: D. E. Ingram, Department of Languages and Literature, Mt Gravatt College of Advanced Education, Queensland, 4122
Distribution Centre: Language Centre, University of Melbourne, Parkville, Victoria, 3052

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Printed by Bridge Printery Pty. Ltd., 29-35 Dunning Ave., Rosebery, N.S.W.

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LANGUAGE IN THE CLASSROOM

Jack Thomson

A. Language and Learning

"What a bore school is nowadays, the same as it has been for hundreds of years. What we get is the same old thing—teacher, outdated textbooks, and a class fed up to the teeth with the teacher and the school. What we need is one vast change in the educational system of this country. Children do not want to be taught at, but want to find out things for themselves."

—Robin, 16[1]

"Subjects should be made more exciting instead of sitting in a desk reading or half-listening to a teacher going on and on about a particular thing."

—Angela, 13[1]

"Geography lessons are very dull. How better it would be, instead of merely accepting the fact that region A had limestone, to discover it oneself. Not to read about population distribution, but to prove it by local surveys, to see tors instead of merely reading about them."

—Anne, 17[1]

"By teaching with books—textbooks being the heart and soul of teaching today—no practical experience of any subject is gained. Everything learnt is second hand if it comes from the teachers, and very often out of date and misleading if it comes from the books . . ."

—Richard, 17[1]

"The usual concept of a school is one of a place where young people are assembled to learn facts. This is the major thing I would change. What is the point of taking facts from a book and teaching them to pupils? In a book, facts are in logical order and correct; while in the brain of the average pupil they are muddled and frequently wrong. Surely it is far better to leave the facts in convenient books and to teach pupils to think. Obviously, certain facts and abilities (such as reading) will have to be taught; but the fewer the better. These would be taught at the equivalent of the present infant schools."

—Alan, 17[1]

"The people who write textbooks do not make mistakes—and the best way to learn is by your own mistakes."

—Jennifer, 15[1]

"All my grammar and syntax has been learnt from time-worn, smelly little books . . ."

—Peter, 17[1]

These are some of the responses to a survey, conducted by *The Observer* in England in 1967, in which school students were invited to describe "The School That I'd Like". The comments of the seven students recorded above provide a representative viewpoint of many hundreds of respondents. As Edward Blishen, who collected and edited the students' responses, says:

> *"The picture they build up of learning as it now most often is in the schools is one in which they, the pupils, are passive, sometimes very reluctant, recipients; the teachers are the providers—aided, if that is the word, by textbooks that also, oppressively, if not dully, provide."*[2]

Many of the pupils see themselves as passive recipients of predigested knowledge; a situation in which their function as learners is one of absorption and regurgitation. Schools are seen as Gradgrinderies, factories using assembly-line methods to produce conformist people. Now, eleven years since *The Observer* survey, and nine years since Blishen's publication of the responses, the mechanistic tradition is still strong, at least in Australian education (or instruction) systems. While syllabuses have changed, and there are becoming available more and more textbooks which are taking the emphasis from formalised drill and placing it on the original and personal response of the child as a human being, many teachers have not changed, and in their "transmission-tube"[3] instruction methods and in their unthinking and routine use of textbooks, seek, whether consciously or unconsciously, to equip the individual with unassimilated knowledge and mechanical skills so that he may function as a cog (both as worker and consumer) in the commercial and technological machine.

Consider the amount of writing done by pupils in most subjects of the secondary school curriculum. The writing of notes, essays, reports, scripts, personal accounts, stories, summaries, answers to questions and so on occupies so much of school time that it is obvious teachers regard the activity as one of central importance.

The assumption seems to be that such an output of writing by pupils inevitably makes a significant contribution to their learning in all parts of the curriculum. However, recent research[4] has shown that writing is not always used by teachers in ways that enable it to make its maximum contribution to the learning of pupils. Too often pupils are merely required to reproduce information provided by the teacher or text-book and to write in an approved academic style rather than to recreate information for themselves in their own expressive language in order that they might achieve understanding. Using our own language permits us to begin where we are, with what we know, and to move on from there. It permits us also, because it is familiar and comfortable, to focus our primary attention on what we are saying and not on how we are saying it.

Obviously it is essential that such a major educational process as writing should be made as effective as it can be, and to this end not only do pupils' abilities in writing need to be developed as fully as possible, but also, and more importantly, writing activities in the school should be organised in such a way as to make their optimum contribution to learning.

Talking and writing are the main ways pupils formulate knowledge and relate it to their own purposes and view of the world. The central importance of language in learning is that it makes thought processes readily available to inspection and revision. As Douglas Barnes says, in *From Communication to Curriculum*:

> *"If we know what we know, then we can change it. Language is not the same as thought, but it allows us to reflect upon our thoughts. The metaphor contained in 'reflect' is here highly appropriate: what we say and write mirrors our thought processes, and enables us to take responsibility for them. Thus children and adults alike are not only receiving knowledge but remaking it for themselves."*[5]

Or, as E. M. Forster put it more bluntly, "How do I know what I think until I see what I say?". He could, just as appropriately, have said as well, "How do I know what I feel until I see what I say?". The act of speaking or writing makes us conscious of thoughts and feelings we have: thoughts and feelings that remain only vague, half-formed and half-understood, until we make them explicit to ourselves (as well as to others) in articulating them in speaking and/or writing. We are not really aware of the gaps in our understanding of information we have read or been told until we are forced to put that understanding into words.

As Ken Watson has recently pointed out,[6] probably the major educational insight of the last decade is encapsulated in James Britton's statement, "We learn by using language and we learn language by using it". For all teachers of all subjects, pupils' *use* of language should be seen as central to the learning process. Teachers, by their language policies, can enable or inhibit the learning and understanding of their pupils.

When the "Writing Across the Curriculum" research team at London University began their work in 1971, they saw their main problem as that of altering teachers' views of language. As Nancy Martin says, in *Writing and Learning Across the Curriculum*, the aims were, at first, "to get people to recognise language as a major intellectual tool",[7] to see the use of language by pupils as basic to their thinking and learning as well as to their personal and emotional development.

To assume that language is simply a vehicle for the communication of ideas and information is to take a narrow view. For the pupil-learner, language has three major uses: in the first place, it is a means of understanding himself and of exploring and coming to understand his experience and his world (including information about his world derived from secondary sources, such as books); secondly, it is a means of communication; and thirdly, it is a means of establishing relationships with others. The

first use, that of language as a means of learning for the individual, is the focus of this article.

Language is the major means by which we consciously organise experience and reflect upon it. As James Britton says, in the Foreword to *Language and Learning*:

> *"We use language as a means of organising a representation of the world—each for himself—and the representation so created constitutes the world we operate in, the basis of all the predictions by which we set the course of our lives."*[5]

Language, then, does not merely transmit thought; it shapes thought. It is our ability to use language, in talking and writing, that allows us to impose order and understanding on the myriad of impressions and perceptions which come to us from the outside world. In effect, we talk and/or write our way into new understandings. Through language children come to terms with new knowledge by relating it to what they already know. But this takes time. If in the classroom we limit spoken language to the teacher providing information and quizzing pupils to elicit "correct" answers (usually each of one word), and limit writing to reproducing information gained from teacher or text-book, we ignore the function of talk and writing as an instrument for reshaping information, that is, we ignore the function of language as a means of learning.

It is a relatively new idea that pupils' use of language is fundamental to their learning and their personal development. We have known for a long time that children learn language by using it, that they learn to write by writing, for example, and our teaching for many years was based on the notion of setting exercises in writing to improve children's skills in writing. However, we now know that children *learn* by using language, by talking and writing. That is, using language enables children to interpret experience and information—to learn from experience and to understand information.

Pupils have to make sense of their personal experiences if these experiences are to have any significance for them. Also they have to make sense, for themselves, of new information if they are to be able to use it. We learn new knowledge only in so far as we are able to bring it into a meaningful relationship with old knowledge, and in this process thought and language are very close together. As Douglas Barnes says:

> *"In the last analysis, knowledge is useless to us unless it is incorporated into the complex of thoughts, feelings, attitudes and evaluations on which our actions are based."*[6]

When information is received it doesn't drop into an empty pigeon-hole, but comes up against what is there already—namely one's present state of knowledge and understanding (what Britton calls our "representation of the world"), which is predominantly a linguistic construct, and a process has to occur of incorporating the new information into the old information

(what Piaget called "assimilation"); or the old may be modified to take account of the new (what Piaget called "accommodation").

A pupil, then, to understand information must be able to make connections between the new information and his present understanding, between what is new and what he knows already. To take a very simple example, a five-year-old, on seeing a tape-recorder for the first time, described it as a "sound-camera". She knew about cameras, and seeing how the tape-recorder worked, formed the connection between its function and that of the more familiar machine. The new was explained in terms of the familiar. Similarly with all new experience we all have: by placing the fresh experience in the context of what has happened to us before, we can hope to understand, appropriate and incorporate it.

If new information is totally strange to a pupil, and cannot be linked with his present understanding (or "representation") in any way, all he will learn, if anything, is a form of words, the words of the teacher or the text-book. He mimics the surface features of the language. It is futile to force secondary school pupils into the mould of what Douglas Barnes calls "subject-specific language"[10] because in such circumstances children focus primarily on the language as language instead of on the experience that they must make sense of by applying their own language to it. Harold Rosen says that the impersonal language of many informational text-books, with their writers' concerns to maintain the conventions of transactional writing, often "looks at children across a chasm", and he explains that the problems it creates for both fluent and not-so-fluent pupils are great, although different for each:

> *"The worst way to bridge this chasm is to encourage children to take over whole chunks of it as a kind of jargon (examinations have been the great excuse). For fluent children, such as moderately successful grammar school pupils, this process is fatally easy . . . Instead of the new formulations representing hard-won victories of intellectual struggle or even partial victories, they are not even half-hearted skirmishes. Instead there is empty verbalism, sanctioned utterance and approved dogma; behind them is a void or chaos. The personal view is made to seem irrelevant; it is outlawed. The conventions of this language are not taken over as are the conventions of other uses of language, at first experimentally and then with growing confidence, but unthinkingly, lock, stock and barrel. Language and experience have been torn asunder.*
>
> *For other pupils, however, the gap between their own language and the textbook is so great that the textbook is mere noise."*[11]

It is the teacher's responsibility to assess the way in which language is being used as his pupils grow towards greater maturity, to help them judge the appropriateness of their efforts, and to inspire a willingness to try new forms of expression. However, when faced with the daily pressures of the classroom, many teachers are prone to emphasise accuracy or conformity to the conventions of language. If this is taken too far, teaching soon becomes little more than a tedious, spiritless business of correcting grammati-

cal errors and drilling the rote learning of unassimilated information. As Douglas Barnes says,

> *". . . the teacher's task should not be to introduce a new set of linguistic forms, but to help his pupils to use language to organise experience in a new way."*[12]

We can't really be said to know anything until we've made it part of our way of thinking, and that means getting our own language around it. Experience, if it is to be meaningful, is not what happens to you but what you do with what happens to you, and the most important way of processing experience or new information is to represent it to yourself in your own language. For pupils to make something of their classroom experience, including the reading of a text-book, they must have the opportunity to talk and/or write about it in their own language in order that they may shape and clarify it for themselves. Knowledge is something that each person must make for himself, and he does so by putting new information or experience into his own personal, informal language, in speech first and then in writing. Concepts in History or Science, or in any other subject, can be formed in no other way.

B. Classroom Interaction: The Language of Teacher, Textbook and Pupil

(i) In his paper, "Language in the Secondary School",[13] Douglas Barnes analyses transcripts of classroom talk in which teachers' failures to allow pupils to relate new learning to what they know already prevents them from talking themselves into new meanings. In many cases the teacher is, by his method of questioning, simply providing slots into which the pupils slip predictable phrases.

Learning all subjects can be inhibited if "subject-specific" language gets in the way of genuine understanding.

(ii) Consider the transcript below from an English lesson which the teacher probably wrote up in his programme register as "class discussion". The pupils had been asked to read the story, *The Loaded Dog*, in preparation for the lesson. All the pupils came along with plenty to talk about, but the teacher wanted one-word "correct" answers. This is one of the teacher's language-games. It is called the "guess what word I'm thinking of" game.

Teacher: *What* kind *of a story is* The Loaded Dog?

Pupil 1: *Well, sir, I thought it was pretty funny, that bit about the feller climbing up the tree and the dog dropping the cartridge with the lit fuse at the bottom of the tree, and . . .*

Teacher: *Stop raving on. What* kind *of a story is it?*

Pupil 2: *Is it . . . er . . . humorous, sir?*

Teacher: *Humour* or?

Pupil 3: *Eh, me?*

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Teacher: *HUMOUR OF INCIDENT OR HUMOUR OF CHARACTER??!!*

In the above, Pupil 1, who doesn't know the rules of this language game, offers a sequence of ideas, and has to be interrupted and squelched by the teacher. The hesitancy and alarm registered by Pupils 2 and 3 indicate how quickly the rules have been learned by them! Within one minute of the beginning of the lesson all the pupils had come to realise that the story was no longer "funny", and that "literature appreciation" was a deadly serious mystery.

I suggest that the pupils have learned three things from this fragment of a lesson:

1. that thinking is not appropriate in this teacher's lessons;
2. that their own ideas and feelings are deemed as irrelevant by this teacher;
3. that if they want to succeed in school, they had better use the teacher's words and language even if they don't understand it. (This is what Barnes calls "empty verbalism".)

The teacher has, in rejecting the pupils' own ideas and feelings, given them no help with the assimilation/accommodation process. If a teacher shows to his pupils that he is not interested in their viewpoint but solely interested in checking whether their performance matches his criteria, he implicitly discourages them from trying out their existing knowledge against the new.

(iii) *"We had been given our instructions the previous day. We were to learn and memorise, and be able to recite exactly word for word, twenty equations from our textbook for the following day's Science class! Now the following day was already today.*

I remember sitting there, just another victim waiting for the question to fall like the sharp, swift, insensitive edge of the executioner's axe. Words and questions ran crazily back and forward through my head, bouncing from the sides of my skull like ping-pong balls. All the time my tiny, incoherent mind became a tangled mass.

The bare, cold wooden floor-boards creaked as he (the teacher) paced methodically and rhythmically backwards and forwards. The room vibrated and echoed as his voice, deep and tense, penetrated the stillness. The questions flowed systematically down each row, from pupil to pupil, each popping up in turn, automatically, from her chair, like a released spring, incomprehendingly reciting the appropriate answer and then swiftly replacing herself to her former position, relieved at having produced the correct response. All this time I was anxiously working out how close my performance was approaching. My eyes jumped out uncontrollably, my body shifted uncomfortably around the wooden stool and my hands were stiff and sweaty.

Then it was upon me. The question came straight, direct and unfeelingly. But nothing came in return! My mind was blank as a sheet

of unused paper. The silence was unnerving and there was only the squeak of the floor under the teacher's pressure. The same words were flung at me but still nothing! My head was a maze of words, none of them making any sense or falling into any order. My hands became clammier; my body was frail and my knobby knees shook involuntarily. BANG! The sound of the teacher's hand upon the desk. Unthinkingly my eyes blinked rapidly in time with the sudden jolt of my body. My feet were riveted to the floor.

My head spun as he repeatedly questioned the reason for my ignorance. The wind outside screamed and howled as the words echoed in my ear-drums . . .

'Why don't you know the answer? Didn't you learn your Science, or don't you want to?'

My voice sounded like a mouse caught in a trap. 'I . . . I . . . I don't remember.' The atmosphere of the room was now dense and I felt that a razor blade could readily slice pieces of air and completely remove them, leaving gaps for easier breathing . . ."

Here an eighteen-year-old student looks back in the spectator role on her traumatic experience of one kind of classroom interaction in order to exorcise it. In Delia's classroom there was no meaningful contact between the language of the pupils on the one hand and the language of the teacher and text-book on the other. The teacher's language and the text-book language worked effectively to shut out learning. The teacher created a simple stimulus-response learning situation in which the text-book provided the information, the pupils supposedly learned the information—passively, by rote—and the teacher ensured that the information had been learned. Many classrooms are organised according to this three-stage pattern:

1. teacher and/or text-book transmission of information to passive pupils;
2. pupil response, oral and/or written, to test learning of information;
3. teacher evaluation of pupil-learning, based on "correct" oral or written answers, or accurate summaries written in the appropriate impersonal mode and academic-subject language style.

Edward Blishen, in *The School That I'd Like*, commenting on the pupil responses to *The Observer* survey quoted earlier, draws attention to the unholy harmony of purpose between the "transmission-tube" teacher and dreary text-book:

"Note how (the children) hammer the textbooks, principally because these are very often prime instruments by which the teacher makes the natural expression of curiosity—the natural making of mistakes and arguing out of issues—difficult if not impossible. The textbook is a despot, and knows all, and has already arranged the matter of learning in order (and, of course, too many teachers simply act as a kind of ventriloquist for the textbook—secondhandedness added to secondhandedness). The children know, by instinct sharpened by their daily impatience and boredom, that the best part of learning is the making of order for

yourself. Of course with help, from teacher and textbook authority; but these should give guidance when guidance is needed, present information when information is required, and not stamp out the path from beginning to end in advance . . . For what children want is to make learning their own."[14]

Note the terms mentioned by the girl in her account: "Words and questions ran crazily back and forwards through my head". In being forced to mimic the language of the text-book many pupils are conditioned to see such language as meaningless, as being unrelated to reality as they experience it. "Now my head was a maze of words" shows how little connection there was in this classroom between words and meaning.

What the pupil learns in such classrooms is a form of words, a style of language divorced from the meaning the language is supposed to represent. In these circumstances pupils experience what Harold Rosen calls "linguistic-intellectual bafflement". Rosen says:

"Difficulties of this sort turn whole subjects into foggy mysteries and for many children the fog is so impenetrable that all higher levels of learning become unattainable. They permeate textbooks, are scattered indiscriminately throughout the stodgy pages of dictated notes, and, less frequently, are part of the teacher's spoken instruction or exposition in the classroom."[15]

This sort of concern by pupils with using the correct technical word rather than with getting their own language around their own thinking, leads to the pursuit of irrelevance, the imbibing of uncontextualised factual information.

Here is a paragraph from a History text-book for use by junior secondary pupils. The section is headed "The Renaissance Spreads North":

"In England, critical scholarship found expression in Sir Thomas More's 'Utopia', published in 1516, a description of an imaginary, perfect society, while in Germany Reuchlin (1455-1522) produced a Hebrew dictionary which aroused opposition from conservative academics at Cologne University. The satire 'Letters of Obscure Men' (1515-17) by von Hutten ridiculed the ignorance and vice of the conservatives who opposed the new freedom of learning."[16]

This passage, with its bewildering array of seemingly unrelated facts, dates and titles, is typical of the book. How can a second form pupil translate the ideas into language he finds meaningful?—"critical scholarship", "conservative academics" and so on? What often happens is that when pupils are asked to produce written work based on such text-book material, they copy the style of the text-book with an obvious lack of understanding of the concepts involved. Further, if they succeed in copying this formal detached style their work is given approval. The pupil who attempts to explore text-book content using his own personal, expressive language—a considerably more difficult task—is often penalised.

In classrooms like these the most important stage in the learning process has been bypassed—the assimilation of new concepts into the pupil's existing linguistically constructed representation of the world, and the accommodation of this representation to accord with new knowledge. It is likely that no connection has been made by the pupil between his present representation and the new material. Such a connection can be made only if the pupil is able to get his own language around the new information. He needs to express the new information in his own words, in speaking or writing, before he can, by inspecting his own verbalisation or written account, abstract the concept or objective information from the personal, subjective, expressive language in which it is embedded and through which it is assimilated.

C. Teaching Styles: The Barnes-Shemilt Transmission-Interpretation Model

The examples of language in the classroom explored in the last subsection raise the question of the extent to which the teachers involved recognise the role language plays in the learning of their pupils. This leads us to a consideration of the systematic study of teacher-attitudes towards language, conducted by Douglas Barnes and Denis Shemilt[17] of the University of Leeds Institute of Education.

Barnes and Shemilt devised a series of questions asking teachers about their purposes in the setting, evaluation and use of pupils' written work. Their starting point was the conviction that the way teachers think about language activities in the classroom affects the range of language functions available to pupils. They believed that teachers' views about classroom communication and its functions tend to be held strongly, but intuitively and inexplicitly. Their questions related to teachers' attitudes towards written language work because of their belief that teachers, working in a school system which has traditionally emphasised and valued writing more than speech, would hold more clearly articulated attitudes towards writing than towards speech. By asking teachers of a range of secondary school subjects about their setting of written work they hoped "to throw light upon teachers' implicit beliefs about communication and learning as a whole" and so "to find how teachers differed in their tacit assumptions about classroom communication". Barnes and Shemilt categorised the teachers' answers, and located each teacher on a Transmission-Interpretation dimension which could be used to relate each teacher's understanding of the role of language in learning with his classroom practice and his demands on, and expectations of, his pupils: as they put it, "teachers' assumptions about classroom communication provide a framework in which we can understand how beliefs about knowledge relate to the role assigned to pupils in learning".

In order to clarify the significance of their results, Barnes and Shemilt formulated two contrasting teacher stereotypes falling at the extreme ends of their dimension:

(i) *The Transmission teacher* they characterise as one who implicitly defines learning as the acquisition of uncontextualised information and skills; interprets teaching as instruction; and assigns his pupils a passive role in learning, encouraging them to pursue external conformity to models in their writing;

(ii) *The Interpretation teacher*, on the other hand, is one who defines learning as a process of assimilating and accommodating to new information and experience whereby the individual pupil is continually refining his representation of the world. The Interpretation teacher, therefore, interprets teaching as the organisation of learning situations, and assigns his pupils a creative and active participatory role in learning by encouraging them to make sense of the world for themselves by talking and writing about it.

Barnes and Shemilt found that in their survey of 125 teachers a "large proportion . . . made responses which fell in certain of the Transmission categories". Most of the teachers did not see writing as a means of making sense of new knowledge and new experience. Yet, as Barnes points out, pupils have to re-interpret knowledge for themselves in order to possess it.

Ken Watson's small survey of teachers drawn from five secondary schools in the Sydney area produced the same sorts of results as the Barnes-Shemilt study.[18] The great majority of teachers saw the value of writing as limited to providing feedback for the teacher on children's knowledge of content and helping the pupil by providing him with a record for future use, such as in examinations. Only one teacher mentioned the value of writing as an aid in the clarification of ideas. Watson reports that at least twelve of the fourteen teachers of the survey would be classed as "transmission teachers, largely unaware of the full potential of writing as a means of learning".

D. Transmission Teachers at Work

What follows is the response of a Science teacher to a slightly modified version of the Barnes-Shemilt questionnaire:

The Process of Writing: Questionnaire

1. This question relates to why you set written work and what value you believe it to have for your pupils. Please complete the following to include your main reasons for setting written work:

   When I set written work, I do so primarily because this is an integral part of the experiment, and is necessary as an accurate and concise record of the apparatus, method, results, and conclusion for that specific piece of experimental work.

2. This question relates to what you think is most important to bear in mind when you set written work. Please include the main things you bear in mind, e.g., the characteristics of the writing you want pupils to produce, the requirements of the task, the objectives of the writing, the abilities of the pupils, the context in which pupils write—including the pupils' audience and their awareness of their purpose in writing, etc.

The pupils are aware of the need to keep accurate notes, as I insist that their records are for future reference, when progressing to more advanced work, and as a means of disciplining themselves to writing down observations, as and when these arise. I try to ensure that the amount of writing be kept as small as is consistent with giving an accurate and factual account of the practical work undertaken. Where I have less able pupils, some of the writing is done by me on the board, as a lead in to their completing sentences in the correct sequence of events.

3. This question relates to what you do with pupils' work when they have handed it in. Include as many items in your answer as relate to your practice:

(a) When I mark written work, I usually take care to see that the work is complete. Next I look for accuracy in detail and order in the method and results, together with any observations and conclusions arising therefrom.

(b) The factors in a pupil's writing which influence me in awarding a grade of A are, those in 3(a) together with care and tidiness in the presentation of the work, especially if the work is presented as showing pleasure and interest in the subject. I would, in general, expect all aspects of the work to be precise and outstanding, as compared to an average piece of work.

4. If, under certain circumstances, you make further use of pupils' written work (e.g., for supplementary or future teaching), please indicate as follows:

If I found that there was a particularly good consistent standard of work from any one year group, then I may retain some of this work, if possible, as a reference standard for following groups, when marking and grading their work, bearing in mind the general ability of the year as a whole.

All of the teacher's responses are in the extreme "transmission" category. He is quite explicit in his view that written work is valuable primarily as a means of storing information, and he emphasises the importance of accuracy and neatness in the finished product. In itemising the factors in a pupil's writing that lead him to award an "A" grading, he mentions, as well as the above, "evidence in the presentation of pleasure and interest in the subject", a quality of pupil response irreconcilable with his stated aims and procedures. In conversation, he lamented that the highest grade he has awarded to any piece of writing by a Year 7 pupil this year is C+, expressing considerable disappointment in the lack of commitment of the present crop of first form pupils. Significantly, he states in his answers to the questionnaire that the only use he makes of written work is to retain outstanding pieces as a "reference standard" for classes in succeeding years.

The following piece was written for this teacher by an 11 year old of above average ability in his first week of secondary school:

Method. Finding out if the weight of a Pendulaum Changes its time.

Aputuis- Reutort - stand and a Boss and clamp.
Set of weights
Method We set a experment diragmme Shows we set the lenght of the pendulum at 20cm. and then took the time from 20 swings each. Time we decesed the weight of the pendulum by 10 grams and took the time from 20 swings and make a table of results.

		Time for 20 swings
100	21sec	
90	21sec	
80	21sec	
70	21sec	
60	21sec	
50	22sec	
40	21sec	
30	21sec	
20	21sec	
10	21sec	

My pulse beat is 61 sec
The weight of the pendulum has no effect on the time of the swing.

C-

Here is your diagram

Here there are very clear indications of the boy's confusion:

(1) The specialist language of Science is obviously unfamiliar and meaningless to him, as indicated by his spelling of key words—"apatuis"

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(for "apparatus"), "Reutort-stand", "diragram", "deceased" (for "decreased"). The poor spelling itself is less important than what it indicates. He is not a weak speller, but his errors in these words reveal how little related to his experience all of the new linguistic items of scientific conceptualisation were at the time. Other specialist words that were spelled correctly would have been equally meaningless to him—"experiment" (in the laboratory context), "beaker", "bunsen", "measuring cylinder", "tripod", "gauze", "asbestos board" (used in his next report, not reproduced here)—a bewildering array of paraphernalia that must have made him wonder about its relationship to his understanding of the scientific world he lived in and understood at a fairly sophisticated level for his age. His talk at home involves a considerable amount of speculative thinking.

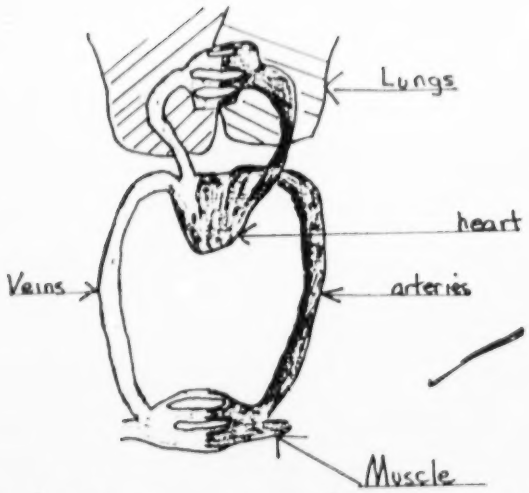
(ii) "Finding out if the weight of a pendulum changes its time" is written against the heading "Method". The heading "Results" has been omitted, but where the information relevant to this heading should appear, the statement "My pulse beat is 61 seconds" is written, a statement that belongs over the page with the second experiment. My interpretation is that he was so concerned to get the unfamiiiar words down and the setting out "right" that he was unable to make any sense at all of what was happening. What is alarming is that it is evident from later pieces, for which he hopes to be awarded higher grades, that his conceptualisation of the scientific principles involved in them has only marginally improved. Far from being led to some wider understanding of the implications of experiments he is barely managing to write coherent reports of what actual things happen in the laboratory.

(iii) There is no hint of the expressive function in any of his Science writings. His most recent piece is indicative of his adaptation to the role of compliant, passive pupil in the subject. It lacks commitment to the topic of the enquiry, reports accurately on the procedures carried out and records the "correct" results with complete dispassion.

The teacher here is trying to teach a body of accepted scientific knowledge, and succeeding only in introducing a new set of specialist words whose correct syntactical and contextual usage he interprets as indication of understanding. Teaching Science as a process of discovery and problem solving requires exploration and the expressive documentation of exciting illuminations. For this boy, Science is at present the imbibing of empty verbalism and inert ideas unrelated to his own observations and experiences of the world outside the classroom.

The following pieces were written by the same boy for his Health Education teacher, again in his first week of secondary schooling:

THe Heart



1. The heart is a muscular organ which moves blood round the body.
2. The heart moves blood to the Lungs where oxygen enters the blood stream.
3. The heart pumps the oxygenated blood from the lungs through the arteries and to the muscles where energy is produced with waste product of carbyon Dioxide
4. The heart then pumps the deoxygenated blood through the veins and to the Lungs where oxygen again enters the blood stream.

good.

The first part consists of a labelled diagram of the heart, copied from a stencil, and four points about the heart's functioning, each point consisting of a sentence containing one or more specialist technical words. Here again is the test of the correct use of technical vocabulary as a supposed indication of the pupil's understanding.

Experiment to find if heart rate increases with exercise

Apparatus body watch.

Method We all took our pulse rate and then ran up and down the playground four th. times. Then we took our Pulse rate again.

Results
Pulse rate before exercise 72 ~~bea~~ ~~sec~~ beats a minute.
Pulse rate after exercise 118 ~~bea~~ ~~sec~~ beats a minute.

Conclusion We found out that with exercise we use energy We then need more oxygen so our heart beats faster.

The questionnaire response of the teacher who set this exercise is interesting, because of the way it focuses on the problem of the difference between what a teacher thinks he is communicating and the message that pupils receive. He says, in answer to one of the questions, "The pupil can add any additional information which he has discovered from sources in school or from his own experience." However, not one pupil in his class did include "any additional information discovered from sources in school or from his own experience", and all pupils saw such additional information as lying outside the boundaries of writing tasks set by this teacher. I asked this boy to think about the work he had done on the heart and the experiment, and to explain if he could why he can run more laps of a local cricket field than I can; why I get exhausted more quickly than he does. While he tried to stick with the technical language, he floundered; but after some questioning he moved into his own expressive language and offered a

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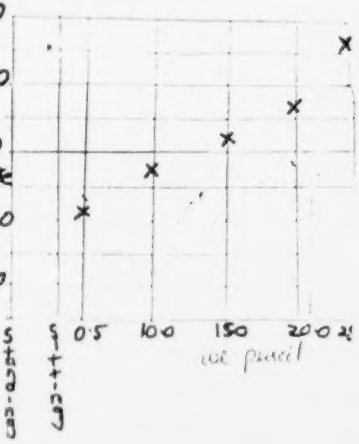
Experiment - to investigate the use of oxygen during exercise.

Results

sitting 74
standing 82

½ minute exercise 88
1 minute exercise 104
1½ minute exercise 118
2 minute exercise 122
2½ minute exercise 146



Conclusion. This exercise proves that with exercise our body uses ~~engt~~ energy. Our heart needs oxygen so our heart beats faster.

Try to be neater. — Some good answers. B-

satisfactory explanation, one that he was then able to make explicit in scientific terms, of the relationship between heart beat rate, oxygen intake and energy expenditure. I am left with the impression that he believes that his teacher believes that personal experience and anecdote have no place in scientific writing—or even, perhaps, in class discussion. In other words, writing was not being used as a way of exploring the implications of the laboratory work for experience outside. It would appear that if this teacher wants his pupils to relate classroom knowledge to what they know already from the world outside, he should encourage writing of a more groping, exploratory, expressive kind, and take steps to check that his intentions are understood by pupils by encouraging them to talk anecdotally in class. (A good place to start on this topic, for example, would be pupils' anecdotes about getting puffed, and the way their heart beat rate increases with strenuous exercise.)

The two teachers discussed above have, from the best of motives, constructed a very confined framework for their pupils' writing. They have drawn the boundaries of the writing task so tight as to not sufficiently allow for the pupils' personal cognitive and affective growth. It is apparent that this pupil has picked up the powerful but sometimes covert message transmitted by these teachers. Much of his writing is concerned with presenting back to the teachers information which they know already, and classifying and organising it at a fairly low level. All of this writing was done in a test situation for the teacher as examining audience rather than in an ongoing responsive situation. There was little opportunity for him to speculate on the material for himself or to explore it in a personal way.

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DIRECTIONS FOR RESEARCH INTO CLASSROOM COMMUNICATION

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It is difficult to imagine anyone carrying out research into language and communication in classrooms who does not hope that his study will come up with something that will affect what teachers do. Yet there is some evidence (Hoetker and Ahlbrand, 1969) that, over the period of a century, researchers' strictures on prevailing teaching styles have had little effect, at least in the U.S.A. Part of the reason for this clearly lies in teaching itself, in that existing teaching styles economically perform some of the functions that have been demanded of teachers with little change for several generations. But some of the ineffectiveness of research in changing classroom behaviour can also be related to the nature and context of the research.

Most research is carried out either by academics or by teachers who are seeking a research degree. The context in which issues are generated, and descriptive and interpretive accounts formulated, is an academic one, often with a frame of reference drawn explicitly from social psychology. The issues raised and the terms in which they are discussed are relevant to that frame of reference; they may from that point of view be very important. Nevertheless they seldom make contact with the "vocabulary of motives" (Mills, 1959) which guide and direct teachers' classroom behaviour. From the teacher's point of view the research is irrelevant. To make the research available it requires more than better communication, more than "popular" books; it requires different research which addresses itself to teachers' issues and offers explanatory accounts which teachers can map on to their own vocabulary of motives.

This can most readily be done through research in which teachers are participants, and not merely "subjects". Our traditional modes of educational research define the academic researcher as "expert" both in determining what constitutes a meaningful issue and what methods of inquiry will produce valid evidence. To work as joint researcher with classroom teachers, the academic would have partly to abandon his claims to expert judgment about relevance; what questions are worth investigating and what answers make sense would have to be negotiated between participants. The university researcher would find himself looking two ways at once, towards his schoolteacher collaborators and their vocabulary of motives, and towards his research peers in universities and elsewhere. (Some aspects of this dual responsibility have been discussed by Walker (1974); I do not propose to deal with them here.) An important task for researchers in planning under such conditions would be finding ways of helping teachers to make explicit to themselves aspects of their vocabulary of motives which have formerly remained unreflected upon and unstated.

Elliott and Adelman (1975) describe several ways in which they worked with teachers, investigating issues which the teachers in groups had defined as problematic. It becomes clear that accepting teachers' questions faces the researcher with the task of developing new methodologies. If what interests a teacher is whether "discovery learning" is going on in his lessons, one cannot fall back on the traditional methods of educational research. Working in this way throws considerable demands on both teachers and researchers. The teachers are required to extend their professional role to include critical reflection and inquiry into what goes on in their classrooms; the academics are required not to unroll the paraphernalia of "objective" research but to invent methods which will help teachers to extend their understanding through informal inquiry. If university academics are necessarily the leaders in such inquiry, they must undoubtedly do their leading from behind.

The foregoing is by way of introduction to a discussion of several diverse pieces of classroom study carried out by various researchers during the last few years. For the most part they are concerned with issues drawn from an academic frame of reference, yet none are far removed from teachers' vocabularies of motives. If teachers and academics are to research together these are the kinds of furniture that the academic might bring to the discussions in which the inquiries are planned. The purpose of this paper is to suggest a range of directions for classroom research which are likely to be of interest to teachers as well as to raise more theoretical issues.

Sharp and Green (1975) carried out a close study of an English Infants School which presented itself as progressive. Children were allowed free choice in many of their activities, but were tacitly evaluated by their teachers as "bright", "normal", or "peculiar" on the basis of what activities they chose. The school policy was to discourage parents from teaching their children to read or to do sums. The investigators interviewed many of the parents and claim to have found that it was those children whose parents had ignored the school's advice who chose to look at books or play with mathematical apparatus, and who were seen as "bright", that is, as academically promising. Children who played quietly with dolls or sand and water would be seen as "normal", whereas those who were disruptive or isolated were seen as "peculiar" or "immature" and of poor academic potential. The point being made was that neither pupils nor—in most cases—parents had access to the evaluations being made and passed on from one teacher to another, nor to the criteria upon which the evaluations were based. It is the latter which may prove of greater theoretical interest. Sharp and Green argue that the "progressive" teaching methods used in the school which they studied were acting as a highly effective means of social control and selection based upon social class differences. Some pupils were rapidly placed by teachers in stereotyped categories. Others were able to build up a developing relationship with the teacher so that they were perceived as having complex personalities and motives, and were not enclosed in a stereotype.

This raises two questions. Would it be possible for teachers to make explicit to their pupils the criteria on which they evaluate them? And if so

what effect would it have? Sharp and Green imply that teachers' failure to make criteria explicit puts certain children at a disadvantage from the moment they enter the school: the issue is thus potentially important. Absolute explicitness is logically impossible. No group of people can make fully explicit to one another their grounds of action since any set of rules needs another set of rules to interpret how the first set is to be applied in particular situations, and so ad infinitum. A teacher and class builds up over time a set of common understandings about how to go about things, and what performances are valued. Nevertheless, it is possible to build up these understandings in a more or less overt way, to make the implicit values available to all, or only to a preferred group of disciplines. The explicitness would presumably be retrospective, whenever teacher and pupils discuss the basis on which each of them was acting; in the nature of things it could never be more than partial. It can be argued that children who don't "know the ropes", the implicit values and styles of behaviour, can never fully learn them in school. Bourdieu (1966) discussing the way in which the French education system values what he calls "style"—a highly valued but intangible aspect of written and other performances in school—asserts that this is only available to those who learn it in their families. They are seen as productive and brilliant. Children from less favoured homes can hope to appear at best as assiduous plodders, since "style" is too intangible to be communicated in the classroom. Whether or not we are disposed to accept Bourdieu's view, we have here a rich source of research issues in investigating teacher explicitness and its relationship to various pupils' participation in learning activities.

Sharp and Green report detailed interviews with the teachers in the school which they studied, and found that they tended to stereotype the parents of their pupils, and to lay at their door the children's behaviour whenever they disapproved of it. (One teacher said that 80% of the children in the school were maladjusted.) Although teachers presented a friendly front to parents when they met them, they saw them as mainly irresponsible and different from themselves. Sharp and Green explain that they were "embedded in a status and interest structure outside school which shapes teachers' attitudes to the working class". It becomes clear from such a study that we cannot hope to explain teachers' classroom behaviour solely in terms of greater or lesser skill, or in terms of sensitivity to pupils' needs. Research into classroom language and communication needs to incorporate an account of the social context, in and out of school, in which it occurs, including teachers' attitudes to their pupils' homes. Relevant also are pupils' and parents' interests and purposes, and their perceptions of how teachers behave to them. A number of ethnographic studies of adolescents in and out of school have recently been carried out in the United Kingdom (Willis, 1977; Woods, 1976) and aspects of these are now being incorporated into our thinking about the classroom. In another paper Woods describes the forms of humiliation which are often used by teachers as a method of controlling pupils, but he describes them from the pupils' point of view, thus filling in an alternative social reality (Woods, 1975).

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In an interesting study, Barry Cooper of the University of Sussex set out to test one step in Bernstein's hypothesis about educational failure (Cooper, 1976). In a simplified form the hypothesis runs thus: (i) Children from working class backgrounds organise their participation in discourse primarily through "restricted" sociolinguistic codes. (ii) Schools demand ("are predicated upon") "elaborated" codes. (iii) Working class children are therefore at a disadvantage. Cooper proposed to investigate whether typical secondary schools are in fact (as step (ii) requires) predicated upon elaborated code. From Bernstein's writing he drew a definition of elaborated code, and used this to analyse lessons taught by seven mathematics and science teachers to thirteen year old pupils in a secondary school. For the definition of "elaborated code", Cooper did not use Bernstein's earlier description in terms of verbal forms, but his later accounts in terms of control and specificity. Bernstein had distinguished the Regulative from the Instructional context (though teaching behaviour relevant to these would presumably occur simultaneously). In the Regulative context, he looked to see whether the control of pupils by the teacher was positional or personal, and whether the rules of classroom conduct were made explicit, or left implicit, or controlled through ritual. In the Instructional context, he looked to see whether pupils learnt through direct teaching or were able to achieve meanings through self-regulating learning activities, and whether what they learnt applied only to the particular situation or was generalisable into a rule. ("Context specific" or "context free".) All of these criteria were drawn from Bernstein's writings, though there they defined elaborated code in the home rather than in the school. As one might expect, Cooper found a predominance of restricted code in both Regulative and Instructional contexts in Mathematics and Science lessons alike. Teachers controlled the knowledge to be learnt, and often failed to answer questions asked by the pupils, who were generally passive. When unexpected experimental results appeared, the teacher told the pupils to ignore them, and from a stance of expertise dictated alternative results which should have happened. In both Mathematics and Science procedures were taught without understanding of the principles involved, and at times principles were enunciated as information to be memorised rather than understood. Cooper does not take an evaluative stance about these findings; his point is that these lessons are dominated by behaviour that in Bernstein's terms is organised upon restricted code. If these lessons are typical they constitute a substantial challenge to the truth of Bernstein's hypothesis. The study could usefully be replicated in other schools, in other areas of the curriculum and with children of different ages.

It is still an open question, then, what part language plays in educational success and failure. Lambert and his associates (Frender and Lambert, 1973, for example) have shown that in Canada teachers' judgments of young students' work is affected by a variety of vocal characteristics, including a French accent, and the pitch and quality of the voice. Nash (1973) has looked at differences in Scottish primary schools in the treatment of children in the same class, and has pointed out that even very young children are

aware of the implications of groupings for reading and number work. The differential treatment of individual children in the same class would seem to offer a very promising area for classroom studies, especially if attention was also given to the teacher's conscious perception of the pupils and their homes, and to the pupils' accounts of what is happening.

There may also be systematic differences between teachers' treatment of different classes. Nell Keddie in a well known paper (Keddie, 1971) has shown how teachers treated differently adolescent pupils in A and C streams, both in offering them different versions of a supposedly common curriculum, and also in approaching the pupils' contributions to lessons with markedly different expectations about whether they would be rational and relevant. In a recent small study of two classes of thirteen-year-olds in contrasting secondary schools (Bliss, 1976) it has been shown that radically different cognitive demands are made on the pupils. In the one school, pupils were expected by all teachers, whether their style was domineering or more open, to take part in rational discussion of the subject matter, and to offer justifiable opinions. In the other school, teachers were similarly homogeneous in attempting little class discussion, and occupying their pupils through worksheets which demanded mainly the seeking of information and its reproduction in writing. In the first school the pupils were expected to be rational beings; in the second the teachers expected, rightly or wrongly, that the pupils would not be able or willing to engage in discussion, though Bliss shows that some of them are able to do so. In these cases the patterns of classroom communication are clearly related to the teachers' perceptions of their pupils, and probably also to the pupils' perceptions of school, and what it has to offer to them. Bliss is rightly unwilling to generalise from his two examples, but his research raises interesting questions about differences between schools.

It would be of interest to many teachers who frequently organise their classes for work in small groups to discover what their pupils gain from this. Mick Wilson has carried out a three-year study of two small groups of children (11 to 13 years of age) engaged in the discussion of works of literature (Wilson, 1976). Several times each term during the three years, Wilson arranged for the two groups (of four children each) and a control group to read a story or a poem. The two groups went on to discuss it, alternately led by the experimenter himself as teacher, or by the pupils themselves with no adult present. Finally the experimental groups and the control group alike attempted a test based on the particular work of literature and designed to test comprehension of central issues and imaginative insight into attitudes, motives and so on. (These ad hoc tests are probably the most questionable aspects of the study: some English teachers would argue that it is not appropriate to evaluate children's responses to literature, since there is no way of establishing preferred norms except through a consensus opinion of those who consider themselves qualified.) Wilson had also developed a set of categories which could be used to analyse interaction patterns in the groups whether their discussion was teacher-led or pupil-led. He hoped therefore to be able to show whether teacher-led or pupil-led

discussion brought about greater comprehension and insight; and also to show what patterns of interaction correlated more closely with effective learning. A brief summary of his findings risks misrepresenting them, but will be attempted. Both the teacher-led and the pupil-led discussions gave test scores significantly better than those of the control group: the scores for the teacher-led discussions were slightly higher than those for pupil-led discussions, but the difference did not reach statistical significance. It was clear that these two groups of pupils could learn considerably from the discussion of literature even when no teacher was present. The two groups differed from one another. The members of one group were highly co-operative but the members of the other were competitive and aggressive to one another. The former learnt slightly more when not led by the teacher; the latter seemed more at ease when taught by a teacher to whom they could attribute authority. It will already be clear to the reader that this study has generated possibilities which deserve further investigation.

In the other part of the study Wilson sought to relate patterns of interaction—as represented by tallies in a category analysis—with test scores. Results here were more puzzling. The only category that correlated with high scores was "Silence". Wilson explains this by saying that during the three years he learnt as teacher in the teacher-led discussions to tolerate more frequent silences while he waited for the pupils' next contribution. He had expected that the frequency of questions calling for "high-level" cognitive operations—Opinion, Interpretation, Imagination, for example—would correlate positively with test scores, but this proved not to be the case. The pupil-led discussions displayed a larger proportion of moves devoted to retelling the story, to conjecture—which Wilson calls "the natural response to literature" since it is a necessary part of the sorting-out of themes—and to unrelated talk, laughter, confusion and so on—which one might guess to have a necessary function in such leaderless discussions. Wilson himself judges that his categories allowed the essential elements in learning talk to slip through: perhaps any category system would have done so. In any case, studies of this kind could be carried out in various areas of the curriculum, and could be of considerable value to teachers.

Perhaps it would not be out of place to add here some points from a study of small groups which Frankie Todd and I recently carried out (Barnes and Todd, 1977). We recorded groups of thirteen year olds carrying out learning tasks set by their teachers in various curricular subjects. Our intention was to develop a descriptive system that would identify cognitive strategies necessary in collaborative learning, and the social skills required to support them. Although it is not my purpose here to report the outcomes of this study, it raised—as if incidentally—several side issues which have wider relevance to classroom studies. At one point during the research we set up an experiment, in the course of which some groups were told that they would later have to write down for assessment the results of their discussions, whereas other groups were told that no such assessment would be required. This experimental treatment proved to be unsuccessful: almost all of the groups behaved as if their performance was being assessed. We were, of

course, relative strangers to them, and in any case schools are places where a great deal of tacit assessment goes on. It seems clear that the greatest care should be taken in interpreting data of this kind, and particularly in generalising from it. What teachers and pupils say and do depends on their interpretation of the situation they find themselves in, and this may differ radically from that of the researcher, whether he is setting up a quasi-experiment or merely observing. It is relevant to add that the most impressive group talk came from groups whom we recorded a number of times over a period of months, who had at least one teacher who understood what we were doing and explained it to them, and whom we took the trouble to talk with informally on a number of occasions.

At an early stage in the study we had hoped to find a quasi-objective way of determining the level of collaboration that a group was displaying. It seemed likely that the discourse of groups working closely together would itself be closely knit by means of forms such as cohesion markers and logical connectives. When we came to inspect our data this did not seem to be the case; groups working closely together often seemed to omit formal links. In effect, they were not necessary, since the relationship of new utterances to what had gone before could often be taken for granted. We came to the conclusion that the meanings generated in group discussions of this kind are necessarily indeterminate. Not only was what was said often ambiguous or opaque to us as outside observers: the students participating often seemed to be attributing different meanings to what was said. Moreover, the meanings apparently available changed in the course of the discussions through a kind of tacit negotiation between the participants' developing viewpoints. Indeed the indeterminateness seemed to contribute to the possibility of such development, to the possibility of the children learning from this kind of discussion. Under these circumstances it would clearly have been inappropriate to attempt to quantify verbal forms, as had been intended. It seemed quite improper to argue directly from forms to meanings, and of questionable propriety to treat linguistic behaviour as indication of cognitive events. In the light of the apparent indeterminateness that characterised many discussions, we wondered upon what basis observers such as ourselves could claim the right to interpret. As a great deal of recent educational research—including some of our own—depends on assuming that language can be treated as an indicator of cognition, and upon observers' interpretations, we found this a sobering line of thought.

Some readers may feel that in the last few sentences this paper has for the first time concerned itself with language and in one sense of the word "language" this is true. The traditional concerns of general linguistics are seldom of central importance to educationists. In trying to understand how talking and writing contribute to classroom learning we often use language as data, but not to answer questions about language forms. Questions about children's learning cannot be answered in terms of the complexity of noun groups, or subordination indices. Cognitive questions for example need to be answered in terms of cognitive categories, even though these necessarily rest upon the researcher's interpretation of utterances. The truth is that as

competent language users we are capable of immensely complex interpretive strategies; we pursue strings of hypotheses, each contingent on the appropriateness of those which preceded it. Our counting of forms or reckoning of indices is pathetically crude beside such complexity. So the student of classroom communication, though often dependent on the insights which arise from linguistics, particularly sociolinguistics, is engaged in a different kind of language study. Perhaps one day that too will become part of "linguistics".

To sum up the main body of this paper, the most promising lines of thought at present would lead classroom researchers towards questions related to learners' access to knowledge. These would include the use of pupil-led groups as a means of increasing children's participation in the conduct of their own learning, the investigation of teachers' explicitness (or lack of it) in making available the criteria used in moment by moment evaluation, teachers' attitudes to pupils and their parents and the relationship of these to classroom behaviour, and finally the different cognitive demands made upon different pupils and different classes by their teachers. In suggesting these directions I would like to make two pleas. We should more often go beyond the classroom to establish the cultural and structural milieu which will help us to interpret classroom events. And we should be very careful about arguing from one context to another, especially when we as observers are partly outside the frames of reference that make the events patently meaningful to the participants. And this brings me back to the issue with which I began. If we can involve teachers in our studies as participants rather than subjects (or should it be "objects"?) we are less likely to set up a view of the world which is unrecognisable to them because it takes no account of their vocabulary of motives.

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TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TO USAGE

Ken Watson

Here are two extracts from English lessons observed in the course of a study undertaken in 1976-77:

Lesson A (Year 9)

Teacher: Right. Now to No. 6. "Supply the prepositions. (1) My opinion differs . . ."

Pupil: "From."

Teacher: "From." Who had "to"? (Some hands go up.) No, never, never. Always "My opinion differs from." "The money was divided . . ."

Pupil: "Among."

Pupil: "Between."

Teacher: "Between." Right.

Lesson B (Year 7)

Teacher: We say "I shall", "you will". Repeat after me: "I shall, you will."

Class: I shall, you will.

Teacher: Again.

Class: I shall, you will.

Teacher: On the board there are ten sentences. I want you to write them out in your books, choosing "shall" or "will" from the alternatives in brackets.

It is doubtful whether the processes of learning one's native language are as directly manipulable as these lessons imply; more seriously, perhaps, the lessons embody notions of correctness that most linguists would reject. In Fred Flower's words, these two teachers appear to believe

> that there is somewhere laid up in Heaven an ideal English, the Queen's English, in which all concords are kept, no infinitives are split and prepositions stand inevitably and invariably before the words they govern.[1]

In an attempt to discover whether such attitudes to language are widespread, sixty-six teachers from eight N.S.W. high schools (a cross-section of State, Independent, Catholic co-educational and single-sex schools) were invited to answer a questionnaire of 25 items on usage. The questionnaire was also administered to a small group of tertiary teachers of English—twelve drawn from university English Departments and five from Education Departments, the latter being involved in the training of English teachers.

Nineteen of the items were taken from a list of fifty-five items administered in a United Kingdom survey conducted by W. H. Mittins, M. Salu, M.

Edminson and S. Coyne,[2] and a further two items embodied similar usages. Of the remaining four items, three were examples of non-standard usage and the fourth was an example of the growing tendency—if the writer's observations are at all typical—to insert "what" in adverbial clauses of comparison. Mittins and his colleagues, noting[3] that for the modern linguist "correctness" is a misleading notion that should give way to concepts of acceptability and appropriateness, were concerned to gather information about current usages and attitudes to usage in order to provide information for English teachers. They gathered responses from 457 subjects, of whom only about one-fifth were in some way connected with the teaching of English. The aim of the present survey was, of course, somewhat different, but the Mittins items were felt likely to provide some useful comparisons.

The Mittins survey invited respondents to indicate their spontaneous reaction to each usage when encountered in four types of situation—Informal Speech, Informal Writing, Formal Speech, Formal Writing. In the present survey, respondents were asked:

> Would you correct a pupil in Years 7-10 who used the following expressions:
>
> (a) in an informal speech situation (e.g., in informal class discussion);
>
> (b) in a formal speech situation (e.g., a prepared speech);
>
> (c) in writing?

One of the sixty-six respondents declined to answer (c) on the grounds that her responses would differ according to the degree of formality of the writing; several others, either through indecision or carelessness, omitted one or more of the items. In the results listed below, "A" refers to the teachers in eight schools, and "B" indicates the university teachers.

		Informal Speech			*Formal Speech*			*Writing*		
		Yes	*No*		*Yes*	*No*		*Yes*	*No*	
ITEM 1										
We have *got* to finish the job.	A	8	58	(88%)	33	32	(49%)	38	23	(38%)
	B	0	17	(100%)	2	15	(88%)	11	6	(35%)
	(Mittins survey: 84% accepted the usage in Informal Speech and 16% in Formal Writing. The other percentages are not given.)									
ITEM 2										
The performance ended early *due to* illness among the players.	A	6	58	(91%)	12	53	(82%)	27	36	(57%)
	B	0	17	(100%)	0	17	(100%)	2	15	(88%)
	(Mittins survey: 61% accepted the usage in Informal Speech; 27% in Formal Writing.)									

		Informal Speech			*Formal Speech*			*Writing*		
		Yes		*No*	*Yes*		*No*	*Yes*		*No*
ITEM 3										
The instruments were *pretty* reliable.	A	2	64	(97%)	26	38	(59%)	34	26	(43%)
	B	0	17	(100%)	4	13	(76%)	9	8	(47%)
	(Mittins survey: 84% acceptance in Informal Speech; 7% acceptance in Formal Writing.)									
ITEM 4										
There were *less* road accidents this Christmas than last.	A	17	46	(73%)	46	19	(29%)	47	18	(28%)
	B	3	14	(82%)	6	11	(65%)	10	7	(41%)
	(Mittins: 55% acceptance in Informal Speech; 18% acceptance in Formal Writing.)									
ITEM 5										
Competitors should try *and* arrive on time.	A	4	62	(94%)	36	28	(44%)	45	18	(29%)
	B	0	17	(100%)	4	13	(76%)	13	4	(23%)
	(Mittins: 55% acceptance in Informal Speech; 6% acceptance in Formal Writing.)									
ITEM 6										
The process is *very unique*.	A	23	41	(64%)	55	9	(14%)	55	9	(14%)
	B	4	13	(76%)	12	5	(29%)	12	5	(29%)
	(Mittins: Categories not given—average acceptance rate of 11%.)									
ITEM 7										
He is older than *me*.	A	6	58	(91%)	38	26	(41%)	42	22	(34%)
	B	0	17	(100%)	4	13	(76%)	6	11	(65%)
	(Mittins: 78% acceptance in Informal Speech; 16% acceptance in Formal Writing.)									

		Informal Speech			*Formal Speech*			*Writing*		
		Yes	*No*		*Yes*	*No*		*Yes*	*No*	
ITEM 8										
They invited my friends and *myself*.	A	13	52	(80%)	49	15	(23%)	55	8	(13%)
	B	4	13	(76%)	11	6	(35%)	15	2	(12%)
	(Mittins: about 50% accepted it in Informal Speech; the general acceptability was 33%.)									
ITEM 9										
What are the chances of *them* being found out?	A	9	57	(86%)	30	36	(55%)	39	25	(39%)
	B	0	17	(100%)	10	7	(41%)	14	3	(18%)
	(Mittins: General acceptability 40%.)									
ITEM 10										
These sort of plays need first-class acting.	A	14	51	(78%)	39	25	(39%)	47	16	(25%)
	B	1	16	(94%)	14	3	(18%)	14	3	(18%)
	(Mittins: 53% acceptance in Informal Speech; the general acceptability was 29%.)									
ITEM 11										
Pulling the trigger, the gun went off unexpectedly.	A	39	24	(38%)	55	9	(14%)	61	3	(5%)
	B	8	9	(53%)	16	1	(6%)	17	0	(0%)
	(Mittins: Overall acceptance rate of 17%.)									
ITEM 12										
She told Charles and *I* the whole story.	A	20	46	(70%)	46	18	(28%)	54	9	(14%)
	B	9	8	(47%)	13	3	(19%)	14	2	(13%)
	(Mittins: Overall acceptance rate of 27%.)									

		Informal Speech			*Formal Speech*			*Writing*		
		Yes	*No*		*Yes*	*No*		*Yes*	*No*	
ITEM 13										
I didn't do *nothing*.	A	56	9	(14%)	64	2	(3%)	64	1	(2%)
	B	13	4	(24%)	16	1	(6%)	17	0	(0%)
	(Not included in the Mittins survey.)									
ITEM 14										
It was *us* who were singing.	A	15	50	(77%)	42	22	(34%)	46	15	(25%)
	B	4	13	(76%)	6	11	(65%)	8	9	(53%)
	(Mittins: Overall acceptance 25%.)									
ITEM 15										
They bought some tomatoes *off* a barrow-boy.	A	28	35	(56%)	48	14	(23%)	55	7	(11%)
	B	3	14	(82%)	13	4	(24%)	17	0	(0%)
	(Mittins: 46% acceptance in Informal Speech; 3% in Formal Writing.)									
ITEM 16										
It looked *like* it would rain.	A	10	56	(85%)	30	36	(55%)	42	22	(34%)
	B	2	15	(88%)	6	11	(65%)	9	8	(47%)
	(Mittins: Overall acceptance 12%.)									
ITEM 17										
I *will* be twenty-one tomorrow.	A	2	62	(97%)	8	56	(87%)	11	51	(82%)
	B	0	17	(100%)	0	17	(100%)	0	17	(100%)
	(Mittins: Overall acceptability 56%.)									
ITEM 18										
Who was he looking for?	A	4	62	(94%)	18	48	(73%)	24	39	(62%)
	B	0	17	(100%)	2	15	(88%)	10	7	(41%)

(Mittins: Overall acceptability 68%. The Formal Writing category was not included for this usage; the authors' comments, however, suggest that they feel the omission was a mistake.)[4]

		Informal Speech			*Formal Speech*			*Writing*		
		Yes		*No*	*Yes*		*No*	*Yes*		*No*
ITEM 19										
This work is better than *what* he usually does.	A	25	39	(61%)	41	24	(37%)	43	19	(31%)
	B	5	12	(71%)	9	8	(47%)	15	2	(12%)
	(Not included in the Mittins survey.)									
ITEM 20										
Neither Tom nor Jim *have* the book.	A	17	46	(73%)	42	22	(34%)	52	10	(16%)
	B	0	17	(100%)	6	11	(65%)	16	1	(6%)
	(A similar item in the Mittins survey achieved 31% acceptance.)									
ITEM 21										
They could have *went* earlier.	A	58	7	(11%)	61	5	(8%)	61	2	(3%)
	B	16	1	(6%)	16	1	(6%)	17	0	(0%)
	(Not included in the Mittins survey.)									
ITEM 22										
Between you and *I*, she is not telling the truth.	A	20	44	(69%)	49	16	(25%)	56	6	(10%)
	B	7	10	(59%)	15	2	(12%)	16	1	(6%)
	(Mittins: Overall acceptance 23%; Formal Writing category not included.)									
ITEM 23										
I *seen* the film before.	A	55	10	(15%)	64	1	(2%)	64	1	(2%)
	B	13	4	(24%)	14	3	(18%)	16	1	(6%)
	(Not included in the Mittins survey.)									

		Informal Speech			*Formal Speech*			*Writing*		
		Yes		*No*	*Yes*		*No*	*Yes*		*No*
ITEM 24										
He could write *as well or better than* most people.	A	13	53	(80%)	40	24	(38%)	48	15	(24%)
	B	9	8	(47%)	14	3	(18%)	15	2	(12%)
	(Mittins: 64% acceptance in Informal Speech; 38% acceptance overall.)									
ITEM 25										
They will *loan* you the glasses.	A	34	31	(48%)	53	9	(15%)	53	8	(13%)
	B	7	10	(59%)	8	9	(53%)	16	1	(6%)
	(Mittins: Overall acceptance 22%.)									

It is clear that the teachers in the eight English Departments have a more tolerant attitude towards these usages than the respondents to the Mittins survey. It should be noted that in no case—with the possible exception of Item 11—is there any uncertainty about the meaning of the sentence. Acceptability, then, is in most of these cases mainly a social question, and that this is recognised by the majority of teachers can be seen in the greater degree of tolerance exhibited in general in the Informal Speech category. At the same time, however, there appears to be a minority of teachers who, in the words of Mittins and his colleagues, exhibit "Canute-like insistence on linguistic practices not endorsed by contemporary society or even by colleagues".[5] It is hard to understand why 12% of teachers would object to "We have got to finish the job" in an informal speech situation, or why 27% would object to "There were less road accidents this Christmas than last" in informal class talk. There is an arbitrariness about the responses to the questionnaire that suggests that the linguistic prejudices of teachers are in many cases being foisted on pupils. It is hard to see why the use of a reflexive in a non-reflexive position (Item 8—"They invited my friends and myself") should be considered so much worse than the omission of a case marker (Item 18—"Who was he looking for?"). Yet 20% object to the former in an informal speech situation while only 6% object to the latter. Again, it is hard to understand the grounds on which "off" in Item 15 is to be considered so much worse than "like" in Item 16.

The insistence of a sizable minority (18%) on correcting "I will be twenty-one tomorrow" (Item 17) in the written situation and of a large majority (84%) that "Neither Tom nor Jim have the book" (Item 20) is incorrect in writing suggests that recent changes in the English language have passed unnoticed by many English teachers.

The reaction to the three examples of non-standard English (Items 13, 21 and 23) gives some cause for concern. In each case an overwhelming majority of teachers indicated that they would correct children using these expressions in an informal speech situation. In two of the schools this reaction could perhaps be explained in terms of the school population, which, being almost entirely middle-class, lacks non-standard speakers. In these schools the teachers may well have seen the questionnaire as asking them whether they would correct a standard speaker who happened to use a non-standard form. But in the other six schools non-standard speakers form a significant minority, indeed in one case a majority. While it is true that "correct" need not necessarily mean "stigmatise", it does seem that most of the teachers in these schools see part of their task as the stamping out of non-standard usages. This seems undesirable on at least two counts. First, unless it is done with considerable tact the child could be made to feel that his language, which is so much a part of him, is somehow inferior, and as M. A. K. Halliday has pointed out,

> A speaker who is made ashamed of his own language habits suffers a basic injury as a human being; to make anyone, especially a child, feel so ashamed is as indefensible as to make him feel ashamed of the colour of his skin.[6]

Secondly, the work of Barnes[7] and Britton[8] suggests that children are more likely to come to an understanding of new knowledge if they are allowed, initially at least, to use language close to the self—what Britton calls "expressive language". Britton refers to expressive language as "the language in which we first-draft most of our important ideas".[9] He points out:

> How in telling about what's been happening to them, for instance, in sharing their experiences, children are also shaping those experiences and therefore making them more accessible for their own learning.[10]

If the teacher attempts to force non-standard speakers to use the standard forms in informal, intimate situations, he may well be creating barriers to learning.

There are good reasons, then, for allowing the child to use the non-standard forms that he brings to school, at least in informal speech situations. Instead of attempting to stamp out non-standard forms—a practice that is in any case not likely to meet with much success[11]—the teacher should be trying to extend the range of linguistic options available to the child. There is no reason to suppose that proficiency in the standard dialect can be achieved only by stamping out the dialect of the child's own social group.

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2. W. H. Mittins, M. Salu, M. Edminson, S. Coyne, *Attitudes to English Usage*, London: Oxford University Press, 1970.

3. Ibid., p. 2.
4. Ibid., p. 105.
5. Ibid., p. 5.
6. M. A. K. Halliday, Angus McIntosh and Peter Strevens, *The Linguistic Sciences and Language Teaching*, London: Longmans, 1964, p. 105.
7. Douglas Barnes, *From Communication to Curriculum*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976, passim.
8. James Britton, "Writing to Learn and Learning to Write", in *The Humanity of English*, Urbana, Ill., 1972.
9. Ibid., p. 36.
10. Ibid., p. 38.
11. David McKay tells the story of a teacher in England who was working with his class on the substitution of *put* for *putten*. He had given them an exercise to do and was walking around the class when one boy called the teacher's attention to his neighbour by saying,
"Look, Sir, he's putten *putten* and he should have putten *put*".
David McKay, "Language Standards and Attitudes: A Response", in A. Marckwardt (ed.), *Language and Language Learning*, Champaign, Ill.: N.C.T.E., 1968, p. 30.

This article was one of the background papers prepared for the Language Development Conference organised by the Curriculum Development Centre and held in Canberra in January, 1978. The author is grateful to the C.D.C. for permission to reprint it here.

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